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ABSTRACT

This paper recounts the author's removal as an Indian child to a non-Indian foster home and consequent alienation and identity crisis, and presents survey results from Indian adults with similar childhood experiences. The problems in this particular case began when, at age 5, the author moved with her family from the reservation to an urban housing project. Family life deteriorated, her parents drank heavily or were absent, and the children were removed to foster homes. The author and her younger brother eventually were settled with a Mexican-American family. In the absence of any exposure to Indian people or culture, and in the face of constant negative comments about her family and the stigma of being a foster child, the author became ashamed of her origins and confused about her identity. In college, she was sensitive to the differences between herself and other Indian students and felt estranged from them. After she married and started a family, she felt the need to reconnect with her culture and her extended family, and both the family and the Indian community were very supportive. A survey of 35 adults in the Indian community, including 20 with similar childhood experiences, examine the development of their Indian identity and, where applicable, feelings about the foster care experience. Medical, legal, or substance-abuse problems were mentioned by 40-75 percent of those removed from families, compared to 27-40 percent of others. This paper includes survey questions and many excerpts from interviews. (SV)

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EFFECTS OF FORCED REMOVAL FROM FAMILY AND CULTURE ON INDIAN CHILDREN

by

Cheryl Avina

Submitted to the author's Degree Committee in fulfillment of the Field Project Requirement

NAES College/Twin Cities

March 30, 1993

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This paper is dedicated to my Grandfather
Mahto ite/Matthew King
whose spirit never forgot me and guided me home again.

I give thanks to the Creator.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We must never forget that we are part of all creation. The gifts we are given to contribute in life are not for the betterment of ourselves alone but rather for the betterment of all our relatives.

I could not have made this contribution if it were not for my husband and children. They gave selflessly of themselves to help me accomplish my goal. I thank my relatives for sharing their memories and for giving their permission to write this paper. I am grateful for my Elders, especially Jim and Jessie Clark who gave their wisdom, guidance and prayers.

There have been other very special people placed in my life who gave of themselves, whether they know or not, my life is richer because of them. I would like to acknowledge the community. They shared their lives with me and allowed me to write about them in this paper and let me know that I was not alone.

I give a very special thanks to Liz McLemore and her son Nathan who sacrificed their time together to give to me. Liz spent countless hours helping me realize my potential. Without her genuine interest in me and my project, her relentless encouragement and support, my thoughts and feelings from my heart could not have been put on paper.

To all my relatives, Pidamaya.

INTRODUCTION

This paper has been divided into four major parts. In part one of my paper I share my personal journey to recovery from forced removal from my family and culture as an Indian child. It is a journey that began for me as an adult and that continues. I have chosen to share my personal experience of forced removal to demonstrate a human story. I use the term "forced removal" because I had no choice regarding where I wished to live. People I never even saw were making decisions about my life. Moreover, my parents were left ignorant of their legal rights regarding custody of their children, and my extended family was not considered in my placement.

My story is unique only in that it is my story. Within the Indian community there are many stories that parallel my own; many Indian people have had similar experiences of forced removal, and we each have our personal struggles. The experience of forced removal leaves those that go through it with a great deal of devastation, denial, shame, and pain to work through. Our lives are greatly altered as human beings and Indian people because of these experiences. We are left to feel alienated. Where do we go in order to recover what has been taken from us? Will we ever feel totally accepted as Indian people? Will the shame we feel ever subside? In my attempt to answer some of these questions, I developed and issued a survey and did personal interviews to compare and contrast the effects of forced removal and non-removal on Indian adults.

Part two, the "Project Justification", explains my reasons for conducting interviews and developing a survey. This section also provides information on the development of the Indian Child Welfare Act, which called attention to the disproportionate number of Indian Children being removed. It also explains the immediate effects that the prior generation experienced as a result of their own forced removal. This section connects the history of Indian people with what we are experiencing now.

Part three illustrates the experiences of the broader community. These experiences are shared through unsolicited interviews. I have also supplied some answers given in the surveys. These surveys depict individuals' feelings of loss regarding their sense of connection to family and community, as well as the loss of their cultural identity. This section concentrates on the human story.

Part four demonstrates effects of forced removal. The results I report here came from a survey I developed and issued to Indian people working within and being served by the Indian community: chemically dependent clients, recovering chemically dependent clients, teachers, directors of programs, counselors, and college students. I intended the survey as a way of gauging interest and experiences from the community, not as a scientific document. This survey compares and contrasts the effects of forced removal and non-removal on Indian adults. The age range I targeted is people 18-55 years old, both men and women of various tribal affiliations. This age range was specifically chosen to demonstrate experiences of removal prior to the passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 (ICWA).

Part One: MY PERSONAL NARRATIVE

My own story begins with my parents. My father was born on the Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota in 1916. When he was 10 years old, he and his siblings were taken to a boarding school in Marty, South Dakota. He was the oldest; the youngest was two years old, and he was also taken to live at the boarding school. They were kept in Marty for five years. When my father was 16 he was taken to another boarding school in Wahpeton, North Dakota. He lived there until he was 18 years old. He attended one year of high school when he was 19 at the Flandreau boarding school. At age 22 he was inducted into the army; he fought overseas in WWII and was discharged in 1942. He was 31 years old when he met my mother in 1947.

My mother was born on the Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota, Lake Traverse Reservation in South Dakota in 1931. Here she learned the language and ways of the Dakota people from my grandmother. In 1940 at the age of nine she was sent to live at Tekawitha Orphanage. My grandparents had no money to support their family; there were four children and no jobs. My grandfather had also been inducted into the army and while he was away, my grandmother was left to take care of the children on her own. One year later my mother went to boarding school in Pierre, South Dakota. As times got even harder on the family, my grandmother sent my mother away to live at Flandreau boarding school to be taken care of. She was there for about three years and was able to return home from time to time. She was 13 years old in 1944. This is when she was sent to Wahpeton boarding school, where she completed the eighth grade. After completing the eighth grade, she went back home to live on the Sisseton-Wahpeton Reservation with her

parents and family. Later my mother and her older sister, who was 19, moved to Fargo, North Dakota to find work to help their family. This is where my mother and father met. She was 16 years old.

My parents lived in Fargo for a couple of years; this was where my two oldest brothers were born. At this time my father and mother began to drink. When my father could not find work, they moved back to Sisseton, where my older sister was born. Times got harder, and my father moved my family to Devil's Lake, North Dakota to live with his parents. This was in 1951. While they were living there my father received his relocation notification.[1] Our family moved to Chicago, where my father worked in a hospital.

In 1955 my family moved back to Fargo, where my mother's older sister (who was married to my father's brother) was living with her family. This is where another of my older brothers was born. My parents' drinking was progressively getting worse. My father wasn't able to keep a job to support his family of four children. As a result they moved back to Sisseton, where I was born in 1957. There were now five of us children.

As I was growing up there, it was comforting to be around my grandparents and family. There was always so much to do with my cousins. My grandparents lived in a big, old farm house. It had a rundown barn and

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[1] The Relocation of Indians in Urban Areas was a policy, carried out by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and initiated in the 1950's, to move Indians from the reservations to urban areas. Through this policy thousands of Indians were to receive financial assistance to move to a city,where a place to live and employment were to have been arranged of them.

chicken coop. There was no electricity or running water in the house, except for a pump in the kitchen. I remember my grandmother speaking Dakota with my mother. I didn't know a lot of what they were saying, but there were many words I did understand and could speak. In addition, my uncles had horses they would train. Horses were always a part of their lives, as they have always been for Dakota people.

As a child I didn't see the hardships my grandparents and family had to go through while living under these circumstances. For example, the Indian hospital that now exists was not there when I was growing up in Sisseton. There was one time when I was walking barefoot outside and stepped on a piece of glass that penetrated my foot. My grandmother immediately sat me on the counter in her kitchen and rinsed the wound. She went out in her back yard to pick a leaf off a plant. When she returned, she placed the leaf in a strip of cloth and wrapped it around my foot. I learned that this particular leaf is used to draw out anything that remains in the wound.

In addition to herbal remedies, my grandmother followed many of the old Indian ways and taught them to her children. These are the things I was learning about my culture. I was not learning them by reading a book, but by living them. Whenever I was not with my mother, I was with someone from my family: my siblings, my cousins, my aunts and uncles, or others that lived on the reservation. I never had any reason to ever miss my parents when they were not around, because I was always with others that assumed their role when my parents weren't there. I remember going to tribal pow-wows. It was wonderful to see the dancers and hear the drum. In my

perception, as a child, it was a simple, peaceful life. I was connected to my family and connected to my people and their ways.

In 1962, I was five years old when my parents moved to a project complex in St. Paul, Minnesota. There were now six of us: I had a younger brother. I was enrolled in public school for the first time. I liked going to school because it was a new and exciting experience. The first day I went to school my mother took the time to make me look and feel special. I was so proud of my new clothes and shoes.

Things were going well for awhile, from what I remember. My mother and father drank, but it didn't seem too bad yet. My father went to work and my mother stayed home, taking care of us. Indian relatives were still a part of our lives. It seemed we had relations that had moved to the city before us, though there weren't many Indian families living in the projects. In retrospect I can remember my younger brother and me hanging around together alot of the time; being older, I assumed the responsibility of watching out for him.

Soon after we were living in the projects, though, my family began to fall apart. I can't remember a time when my parents drank so much. Life was becoming chaotic. My father did not always work anymore, and my mother began to stay away for short periods of time, return, and then leave again. There were times when we younger ones were left alone now. The older ones took turns staying home with the younger ones because my father would return to work. I know I thought at one time that my mother must not like me anymore, and I was angry with my father. When my mother was

home they would both drink, and things would get violent. I was becoming afraid of him. The older ones began to stay away from the house, too. In '63 and '64 my older brothers went back to Sisseton to stay with my grandparents and aunt. They felt that their roots were there. When they'd come back, they stayed with an uncle of ours. I got the feeling that they were happier not being around our house too much. There were times I was afraid of what was happening. My family was out of control.

In January of 1965 my sister, being truant from school alot of the time, had to appear in court with my parents. My parents showed up intoxicated and were given 30 days in jail. At the time I didn't realize what this meant. The chaos was becoming a way of life. The county social service agency sent a housekeeper to stay with us until our parents came home. However, this was not to happen. My older sister and one of my brothers were the first to be sent to foster homes. I didn't know this until long after my younger brother and I were placed in one. I remember, in our case, that we returned home from school one afternoon in February. When I entered the house, a woman that I had never seen before was standing in our dining room. I wasn't frightened; I just stood there looking around, and I saw all of our clothes and toys packed up in boxes. Then my younger brother came in the house; he stood next to me and we didn't say anything. The woman began to speak, saying that we were going to be staying the night at someone else's house. We were never told at that time we were going to a foster home and why. My brother and I were placed in a Polish foster home, where we lived for six months. After two weeks of living there, I felt lonely for my family. Although I asked frequently, no one was telling me what happened to them or what was going to happen to us. I was angry and began

acting out by breaking things. I became clingy to my foster mother, I suppose for the security.

In the time that we lived in this home, I never truly ever felt part of their family. My brother especially was rejecting them. He never responded to the woman's show of affection toward him. He would not let her hug him or get close to him. He really didn't interact much with anyone but me, and my sense of watching out for him became even stronger. A couple things stand out clearly about the time we lived there. I don't remember ever going to a store to buy new clothes or toys. I do remember that one day a big box arrived, and inside were clothes that I was told had been donated to us. Not that there was anything wrong with second hand clothes, but this time I felt different about it. I felt people felt sorry for me.

Also, when I was placed with this family I had long hair that my mother had never cut. I was angry when they took me to have it cut short. I was being changed into something more acceptable to them. Being lighter complected, I could pass for white more easily, but my brother is darker and could not. I had never been made aware of this difference until then. I became a chameleon; I changed accordingly, to avoid the rejection that I saw my brother go through. In my own way I know that I did this to protect both of us.

The foster family was aware that my brother would listen to me. My feelings of responsibility for my brother grew stronger, and at times I was afraid that they would decide to separate us. Three months after being placed in this home, word came that we were going to be able to see our

father. My father wanted my brother baptized, so we were taken to see him. He was living in an apartment by himself now. I wasn't sure I wanted to stay with him that day. I felt torn because I had made plans to do something with my foster family, but I didn't want to be disloyal to my father and missed him. At the last minute I decided to stay with him. Looking back, I can remember how happy my brother was and how much more freely he was acting. When it was time to go back, I cried. I didn't want to leave my father again. My father told us he was working on trying to get us kids back. He was told that in order to do that he would have to stop drinking. He had been sober for awhile already.

The next time I would see my father, he was with my two oldest brothers. My father prearranged a visit and came to pick us up in a car he had borrowed. We waited outside to be picked up. When they arrived, my father didn't get out of the car. We got in and drove away. I remember being frightened because it was apparent they had all been drinking before they picked us up, but after awhile I didn't care. I was just happy to be with my family. I was sure not to tell my foster family about them being intoxicated because I didn't want them to stop me from seeing them. I wasn't told anything about where my mother was, and it had been about four months by this time.

At the end of the summer, my brother and I were moved to another foster home. I was seven years old and he was five. This home was a Mexican American home. This is where we would be left to live until we were 18 years old. The social services kept us together since we were very attached

to one another. At times our foster mother frowned on this because she saw that my brother would listen to my instructions alot of the time.

My parents still retained their parental rights and were allowed visitations. My father would come to get us one Sunday every month. During this time, I soon learned that my mother had moved back to Fargo, North Dakota. It would be two years before I would see her again since the time of our placement. When my father came to pick us up on his Sunday visits, this also gave us the opportunity to see our older brothers and sister again. I looked up to my siblings because I felt proud that I had older brothers and a sister. It always made me feel I had a family of my own. I missed them and I needed them. It didn't matter where they lived or what they didn't have; I just wanted to be with them because this was my family. I felt sad when my father had to return us. I prayed and prayed every night since I had been taken away from my family that we would go back to them. I was nine years old when my mother came back from Fargo to visit us. When she came to pick us up, she was intoxicated. My father had earned his one year sobriety pin during this time, but when my mother returned he went back to drinking. During her visit she spent some time talking to us, showing us pictures of when we were babies, but for some reason I didn't feel I was close to her. I knew then that my prayers were not going to be answered. As a result, I began to conform to the home I was in.

I learned the language, the culture, the value system. I became critical of my real family. I became an Indian child assimilated into another culture. I was always told to be proud of who I was, of being Indian, but I no longer knew what that was. Being in a foster home in itself was a constant

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reminder that my own family could not care for me, and I thought perhaps being Indian wasn't such a good thing; otherwise, why were they letting this happen to me? I was reminded by my foster family that I was a foster child, and I was told my parents did not want me.

I was never taught anything about Indian history and had no connection with other Indian children or families. I was not exposed to those things that had been familiar to me, such as I had been when I went to my grandmother's on the reservation, with her speaking Dakota, cooking the food, and visiting my extended family. At the foster home there was never anything positive said about my family or my Indian heritage. My self esteem came under attack with the constant negative information I was being given about my family and others' images of Indian people. I began to make value judgements on my own family and found no reason to be proud of being an Indian person anymore.

After having lived with my foster family for some time, I was made angry and ashamed of my family. I tried to distance myself emotionally from them. I just couldn't understand why none of my family came to get us. Yet there was this inherent need to belong to them, to stay connected to them. Even though I often told myself that I didn't need them, that I was better off in a foster home, I hurt very badly inside and would cry whenever my father left us after a visit. I really longed to live with my family again. My brothers and sister were becoming strangers to me; my sole connection was my younger brother. I would tell my brother and father that when I turned 18 I would find a place for the three of us and I would take care of them. I wanted to get my brother out of a foster home. I was angry at how

he was treated at times by our foster siblings. It seemed he was always being taken advantage of and being picked on. When I'd speak up I'd be verbally attacked and reprimanded. I learned not to say anything, but I was left to feel like I let him down. I felt I needed to watch out for him.

The visits with our father continued, and I began noticing that each time we'd come back from our visits, my foster mother would be angry. I didn't understand at first but, I realized later that she couldn't understand my need to be with my family. We would tell her very little about our time with our family, talking only between ourselves, because I feared the criticism. In some way she felt betrayed because I still held loyalties to my family. She had a major impact on lowering my self esteem and my sense of who I was, as a person as well as an Indian person. She was critical of my family, telling me that I would be just like my mother and that we were taken off the street like dogs and given a place to live. Our security of living there was always threatened, which would not have been so bad except our only choice was to move to another foster home, not with our family.

There is a stigma associated with being a foster child. I became sensitive to this, especially during my adolescent years. I was ashamed of who I was and of my family. I remember a time when I was 12, when my father came to pick us up. He didn't have a car, so we took the bus. I was ashamed to stand with him at the bus stop. Instead, I waited inside the store until the bus came. During this time I began to turn against my brother. My brother did not conform as easily as I did to living in a foster home. He constantly came under attack for challenging what was happening as far as unfairness in rules and for his outward dispiay of being immune to

personal and family criticism. I outwardly disagreed with his rebellion and felt I had to show my loyalty, but inside I wished I was as brave as he was.

When I turned 13, I learned my mother had started a second family. She had three more children since I had seen her last. I was devastated and hurt. I couldn't understand how she could do this when we were left in a foster home. When I was 17, my mother returned to St. Paul with her new family. For the first time in 10 years my whole family would come together for yet another visit. We were finally all together again, but we were strangers.

This would be the last time I would see all of my family together. I was furious with my parents and felt abandoned. They never stopped drinking long enough to make us a family again. Shortly after I graduated from Catholic high school (all my schooling as a child in foster care was Catholic), I asked my foster parents to adopt me. I never pursued it, though, because there was something about keeping my family's last name that was important to me. I believe it helped me hang onto whatever shreds of identity remained.

I entered college in 1976. I was 18 years old. I attended Macalester College in St. Paul through the Equal Education Opportunity Program, which accepted minority students that would not normally consider (or who could not afford to pay for) such an education. I didn't know what being part of this program would mean. I met other Indian students attending the college, some local, some from out of state. I found that I was not really able to relate to them. It was difficult for me to understand the way in which they socially interacted. They shared common interests, and their manner of communicating was foreign to me. I didn't understand why they were so

ved at times. The group I was most comfortable being around were, of course, the Mexican students. Having been raised in a Mexican foster home, I was very much culturally assimilated.

In the beginning it didn't bother me. As I began to attempt to socialize with the Indian students, however, I became increasingly sensitive that I was different even though I was Indian. I began to feel alienated. But they weren't the ones doing this to me. I was doing it to myself, because of my estrangement from being around Indian people. But I was young and it seemed everyone at that age was a little unsure of themselves. By this time, I was living on my own, with limited contact with my foster family or real family. The only consistent person in my life at this time was my younger brother who grew up with me. I had a falling out with my foster mother and moved out. I was confronted with the fact that I really never was one of their family. In the years that I was growing up with them, there were loyalty issues regarding my real family, and my foster family had no real trust in me. There were different rules that applied to me, living in their home. I was not able to enjoy the freedom that they gave their children. I felt that there was very little understanding, sympathy or respect for my real family. In my younger years I was afraid to give up the security I felt their home offered me. I never had anyone else to turn to, at least that's what I thought at the time. I learned later that my family would have readily accepted me.

During the summer break after my first year in college, I married at age 19. I alienated myself from my foster family and my real family. When my husband and I began our family, I spent my time concentrating on my

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children. My husband is Mexican American, raised with his culture and language. It only seemed natural to raise our children with his culture. I never thought twice about this, until one day in 1984 my brother asked if I'd like to go to a pow-wow with him at the Minneapolis Indian Center. We'd been living in Minneapolis for about six years, having moved from St. Paul in 1978. Yet, during this time we didn't make contact with the local Indian community. So we went to the pow-wow, and it was crowded. There were so many dancers and the drums were beating. It was so familiar, but I felt out of place. It wasn't until my youngest son said to me, "mom, look at all the indians," that I was suddenly filled with shame. Here I was in this huge gathering of Indian people with my children, having forgotten about who we were.

This was the experience that impacted me most. Once upon a time, I knew the meaning of being connected to Indian people, but now I felt like a stranger being around them. I was filled with anger for a very long time. I didn't want anything to do with my family, but I realized I needed them. I needed to learn who I was again. I felt this overwhelming pain inside. How could people have let this happen to me? I didn't understand where all the pain was coming from. I wasn't supposed to feel this way. I was always told I was the strong one. I made it through my family's dysfunction and my foster home experience, didn't I? There would be times that I would drink to get drunk to drown the pain, but I was not being fair to my family. I knew this was self-destructive and it wasn't what I wanted for my family. I was afraid I would become an alcoholic because of my predisposition, so I stopped. I had watched it destroy my parents.

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My husband was sympathetic and supportive of what I was going through. When I decided to make contact with my family, he was very accepting of them and helped with my getting to know them again. He understood the importance of connection to culture and family for myself and our children. I sought help from the Indian community. My husband, children and I began going to the Indian Health Board, participating in the drum and dance group activities. I believe this is where my healing began. I met some wonderful women there who did not truly understand my identity crisis, but knew and understood that I needed their help in making a connection with the Indian community. I began attending pow-wows again and meeting people from the community. I still felt like an outsider, though. What was missing was my connection to my family. There was still the guilt and shame I was carrying around with me.

I decided to take my family back to my reservation during the summer of 1985 for the annual 4th of July pow-wow. I remember I felt anxious to get there. When we arrived, everything had changed so much. The farm houses were gone, and in their place were modern homes and paved roads. I walked into my aunt's house. Seated in the kitchen was my grandfather. I recognized him immediately. My family and I entered the house and were greeted by my aunt and cousins. I walked over to greet my grandfather. He looked up at me and said, "Oh Cheryl, I thought you'd never come back home." To this day these are still the most important words to me. They bring me comfort when those old ghosts pop up. They reassure me that I belong somewhere, that I have a family of my own.

Part Two: PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

The experiences I described in my personal narrative are not unique. The acculturation of Indian children has never had as devastating an effect as it had on the generation prior to the Indian Child Welfare Act and post Termination and Relocation policy era. The results of this exploratory research will help examine the effects.

Prior to the passage of the I.C.W.A. of 1978, countless numbers of Indian children were removed from their homes, family and culture. Indian parents were kept ignorant of their legal rights, and little was done to provide legal counsel for Indian families in custody cases. Poverty was a value judgement made by social workers and judges in removals and custody cases. In cases of voluntary placement, parents found it difficult to get their children back because in doing so, their life style was examined by the social service agency. Moreover, extended family was not considered to be able to care for the children because parents could have easy access to the children. Social service agencies judged an Indian family system according to non-indian, middle-class values. This carried over to the non-licensing of Indian families as foster parents. Indian children became a commodity: money was being made by foster homes and the county.

As the I.C.W.A. was being written, hearings took place and statements were given on April 8 and 9 of 1974 by a wide range of Indian and non-Indian individuals and agencies: tribal council members, social workers, health care workers, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, attorneys, and psychiatrists. The session was entitled, "Problems that American Indian Families Face in

Raising their Children and How These Problems are Affected by Federal Action or Inaction". The following is quoted from a report submitted to the Subcommittee hearings by child psychiatrists, Drs. Mindell and Gurwitt:

> The policy of the B.I.A. has been, on some reservations, to send children to distant boarding schools. This was a wide spread practice with the overt aim of "helping" Indian children enter the mainstream of American life. Now, supposedly, the practice continues in regions where educational opportunities have not been otherwise developed; where there are difficult home situations or deviant behavior. This past educational practice has had a devastating effect on several generations of Indian children, their family life, their specific culture, their sense of identity and their parenting abilities. It is quite likely that the present practices continue to have the same destructive impact, for the message is the same: It is better for Indian children to be reared by other than their parents and people. According to the Association on American Indian Affairs, the practices of governmental and private adoption agencies have resulted in the wholesale and often unwarranted removal of Indian children from their homes, reservations and people (United States Congress, Subcommittee 62).

During my parents' years growing up, children were forced or voluntarily placed in a boarding school. The children that went through this experience were placed in mass numbers in one location. Therefore, they maintained a connection to other Indian children, many of whom came from the same tribal background. Despite this connection, the pain and devastation that these people went through is not to be discounted or minimized.

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The generation to follow, however, came under a different kind of scrutiny. Individual families came under attack by having their children taken from them and placed in private non-Indian foster or adoptive homes. This happened to families on the reservation as well as those Indian families living in urban areas. Consideration was never given by state or federal government agents that perhaps the best interest of an Indian child was better known by the child's tribe and extended family. Even today the concept of the extended family is not understood. Indian families do not consist only of a mother, father and children: instead, the extended family is " a large network of relationships" (Blanchard 59). Despite this fact, court decisions to place Indian children were made without consideration of or for the extended family or community resources. Even less consideration was given to the survival of the tribe with the removal of its most vital resource.

As a result of these occurrences, I decided to develop a survey and take it to the Indian community to assess the effects of removal. The groups I chose to survey and interview varied. They ranged from professionals to chronic chemically dependent clients. My reasoning for this approach is to get a broader sampling of the Indian community. As with my own experience, the countless numbers of Indian children taken from their homes did not come away from their removals unscathed. Through the survey and personal interviews with individuals, I found those that have gone through this experience have needed to be able to talk about it, especially with someone who can relate to their pain. It was apparent that some were further along in their healing than others. With the chemical dependency groups, I was careful to choose those that were receiving support from counselors or were in talking groups. I strongly believe that chemical abuse

is a symptom of forced removal; the responses in my survey suggest this is true.

Even when writing my personal narrative, talking and writing about my own forced removal stirred up a lot of pain. When I distributed the survey, there were those I spoke with that brought to the surface some of the shame I experienced by their simple statement, "I was never removed from my family." It stung a bit to hear them say this with a slight air of arrogance. This comment, which I heard several times, affected me because throughout my healing process, I never felt quite Indian enough. There is a shame attached to not knowing your Indian roots. When people would talk about where they were from--historical matters, community issues, etc.--I would sit silently and listen, feeling like an outsider. But I soon found that the best way to learn was to sit silently and listen. In my healing process I found some very generous people. I began listening to the old ones. Sometimes their silence said more than their words. When I would talk about my pain, their eyes would not say they felt sorry for me; instead, it felt more like my grandfather's words did, telling me I was home again.

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Part Three: THE COMMUNITY'S EXPERIENCES

This section will depict the experiences of Indian people who underwent forced removal as children. The experiences have been taken from three types of sources. The first are oral comments made to me spontaneously. Second was an informal interview that I reqested of a person that answered one of my surveys. Third are comments excerpted from the surveys themselves and written by the respondents. Throughout the interview and survey process, many stories were shared that paralleled my own. The following are brief sketches of these stories and data from the survey and informal and solicited interviews.

When distributing the survey to individuals and groups, I took the time to be able to share some of my personal experiences. I chose to approach the topic in this manner because I believe this is a large part of my own healing process. For many years I carried around a great deal of shame in not knowing who I was as an Indian person, and I attempted to hide it. It is through telling my story that I continue to overcome this shame and to heal. I found that I am not alone.

The following are individual responses to the questions in the survey by people who experienced removal. Also included in this section are excerpts from oral interviews. I have chosen to include them because they are the shared human stories I refer to.

Interviews and Survey Responses

When I spoke with people who answered the survey, I guaranteed their anonymity. This enabled people to be able to sit with me and talk more freely about their experiences. The first two sets of comments provided below are unsolicited due to this approach. The third is an interview that was given with the expressed stipulation that the person's identity not be given. Following these are the excerpts from the surveys.

ORAL COMMENTS: These are some very good questions. This is a very important issue for the people I work with . I went through this, too, being put in foster homes. I remember I was put in white foster homes. I was put in several different homes. I became a little maid in these homes. I didn't know what being Indian was. The individuals I work with are going through some of the same things. They need to have that sense of who they are as Indian people. This is definitely part of their healing, too. We don't approach the way we do things here in a blaming way. When I came into this community, I had to learn a lot of things that I had missed. I know as I was growing up I was told that I belonged to this certain tribe. It wasn't until I was older that I found out what tribe I was truly from. This would explain the pull I felt inside to go with the ways of my people.

ORAL COMMENTS: I don't know who my parents are. I can't fill in the question about the tribe I belong to. I'm still looking. Do you know where I

can go to find out? I was put in a white foster home, then adopted. I still want to know who my real family is. My mother wasn't able to take care of me. I still have a lot to learn about my Indianness. I haven't been able to find the help to do it yet.

INFORMAL INTERVIEW: These questions really make you think about alot of things. They bring up alot of feelings. I remember the first home I was taken to live in. It was a white foster home. I didn't like it there because the man, the father, was pretty mean. He was like this Bible thumping kind of guy. He'd pull my hair when he'd get mad at me. I reported him to the welfare department and after that, they weren't able to take in any more kids. I was in three foster homes. I guess I have to say that when I was put in a foster home I had kind of mixed feelings, good and bad. My parents drank and there wasn't alot of family structure, so in that way it was good. I didn't grow up knowing alot about being Indian, though. I'm still trying to learn. I guess it's not too late. Sometimes I get asked about certain things about being Indian, and I really can't answer. It can be embarrassing sometimes. I read alot. I talk to other Indian people I know. Someday I'd like to write children's books on Indian ways. So I have alot to learn still, but I think it's important that the little ones learn as early as they can about Indian ways.

The following section contains individual responses to the survey. These responses are written according to the order of the questions in the survey.

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RESPONDENT: I have no idea why we were were removed. Then the sexual abuse began with my first out of home placement. My Indianness was affected, but with treatment and healing, I'm back. I decided to learn about my own cultural identity because I had a strong inner pull and wanting to belong. I don't think there is help in the community for a person who is trying to find their Indian identity.

RESPONDENT: I felt sad and scared. My parents were alcoholics and could not care for their children. We weren't able to keep in contact with our family. My removal was a negative experience. I should have been sent to live with Indians. The people I was sent to were prejudiced and violent and abusive people. They were telling people that I was Mexican because they didn't want people to know I was Indian. I am 40 years old now and am still in therapy from this happening to me. I know little about Indian ways and have no self-confidence. This experience has affected my Indianness. Being the only Indian in white schools and being in a white family, I needed to learn about my culture. I hated life and I knew there had to be something better somewhere. I don't think there is support or help in the community to help find my identity. I have found help through my friends, family, and psychologists and psychiatrists. I am happy that now they have the Indian Child Welfare Act. Years ago they did not check out adoptive parents good enough, for if they did I wouldn't have had so many problems. These people treated their dog better than me.

RESPONDENT: I did not experience the ways of my people. I was removed from my home 30 odd times and placed in foster homes and juvenile detention. I don't remember how I felt when I was removed; it started when I was nine months old. I was able to keep in contact with my parents and family. The reason I was removed was my mother's drinking. My removals were positive: I was able to be properly taken care of, but it was negative because I couldn't be with my mother. Being removed from my mother made me feel insecure and neglected, and I had low self-esteem. My Indianness was affected because I wasn't able to know my heritage. I was robbed of it, being in white foster homes and over 60% was worse than home. I learned about my culture because I wanted to be proud to say, yes, I am Indian, and not be ashamed. There is sort of but not much help in the community to learn about Indian identity; I had to help myself. There should be more help out there for mothers and fathers who are really trying to keep their kids. People should not be so judgmental. The needs of the family should be looked at, and things should not be so one-sided. More help should be given to keep the family together.

RESPONDENT: I was not able to experience the ways of my people. I was taken to boarding school and lived in a non-Indian adoptive home. I was five years old when I was removed. I felt violated. I was not able to keep in contact with my family. I was brought up by my grandparents, but was taken away because they were not legal guardians and were told I needed proper schooling. I was taken away by the B.I.A. I have mixed feelings about being taken away. I was getting deeper into trouble by going from one

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institution to another. My removal affected my Indianness. I decided to learn about my culture because I was not able to communicate with Indian people. I don't think there is support in the community for a person who is looking for their Indian identity. I didn't know my parents until I was 21 years old.

RESPONDENT: I was removed from my home one time and taken to live in a non-Indian foster home. I was three years old. I was not able to keep in contact with my parents or family. I was too young to remember the reasons I was taken out of my home. I grew up thinking I was white; this is why I decided to learn about my cultural identity. There is no help in the community to find my Indian identity

RESPONDENT: I did not experience the ways of my people. I was removed five times from my home and placed in foster homes and with extended family. I was 10 years old when I was first removed from my home. I felt very mad because I didn't want to go. I was able to keep in contact with my family. The reasons given for my removal were that my mother couldn't take care of me. My removal was positive because it gave my mother time to get back on her feet. It made me sad. Everywhere that I was sent, they wanted me to be white. They cut my hair and made me go to church. I always knew that I had to learn my own cultural identity. There is help in the community. My family has always taught me my ways.

RESPONDENT: I did not experience the ways of my people. I was removed from my home all my life. I was taken to live in non-Indian foster homes and juvenile detention. I don't know what age I was when I was first removed, ever since I was a baby. I hated it. I was able to keep in contact with my family. I was removed because of my mom's chemical use. My removal was positive. It made me tougher. The foster home/adoptive home experience has affected my Indianness. I decided to learn about my cultural identity because of inner feelings; I want to follow the ways of my elders, for our heritage is dying. There is help in finding cultural identity through elders and medicine men. My family has helped me and also my feelings.

RESPONDENTS: I did not experience the ways of my people in the city. I took trips to visit my grandmother on the reservation and attended pow-wows. I was removed from my home one time and taken to live with extended family. I was 14 years old. I felt scared. The reasons I remember being given for being removed were that my parents abandoned nine children for approximately 6 months before the child welfare authorities, and the police became involved. I was the oldest: I was taking care of my brothers and sisters, and we did okay. My removal was positive and negative. My mother got it together to get her kids back and keep them together. I hated welfare workers; I would lie, hide the younger kids when they came around. I need to learn about my own cultural identity because of my personal longing, desire, quest. I felt I never fit in; I was not a member of the larger community. I was an outsider. There is help in the community for a person who is trying to find their Indian identity. I found help through my job, agency , personal,

community, family, and my journey to reservations to seek out elders/mentors, spiritual teachers, and experiences through ceremonies.

When speaking with the various individuals and extracting information from the survey, I have found there are resounding themes in all of the removal stories. There are feelings of abandonment, anger, loneliness, loss of identity, inability to communicate with Indian people, low self-esteem, and the need to identify and belong to their culture. I know that it took a tremendous amount of courage for these people to share their stories with me. The things that they share stir up the pain of their past experiences. For many, these scars run deep and have greatly affected who they are today.

Part Four: THE SURVEY

Methodology and Preliminary Findings

Because of my own experiences and those I heard from members of the community, I decided to conduct an exploratory survey of people in the community. It was not intended as a scientific sampling of the entire community, but as an initial way of gauging the existence of the harmful effects of forced removal. In conducting my exploratory research, I distributed 96 surveys, with 35 returned. In addition, I interviewed three people who had undergone forced removal as children (these are excerpted in section three). These were not individuals I knew prior to conducting this research; I met them as I was distributing my surveys among various social service agencies. The types of agencies I chose to distribute my survey are agencies within the Indian community that service Indian people. The survey was intended to permit a degree of anonymity not available in an interview situation.

The agencies with which I chose to conduct my survey work with family services, mental health patients, and chemically dependent clients. Both staff and clients participated in the survey.

In setting up the situation for the survey, I initially spoke by phone with the directors and counselors issuing the surveys to their clients, explaining

my study and contents of the survey. I then made an appointment to speak with them in person. As I sat down with each person individually to get permission to conduct the survey with his/her clients, I found it to be a very rewarding experience. I was able to connect my project to issues their clients were dealing with. The agencies were very receptive and found the study to be very necessary.

In two instances I was asked to speak in front of the groups by the directors of the programs. They felt that the explanation of the survey could best be understood in my own words. After explaining my project to the groups, I distributed the survey to those who were willing to fill it out. These two groups allowed me to wait for them to return the survey in person. There was no time limit given for them to answer in these instances. With the other two organizations, I was able to speak with the directors and counselors about my project and survey. They took the liberty of conducting the survey in their groups and collecting the survey for me. I gave these agencies two weeks to have them filled out before I collected the surveys from them.

The following are preliminary findings of this exploratory research. I was able to collect a total of 35 surveys, with the breakdown being (20) respondents that experienced removal and (15) respondents that had not experienced removal. The percentages are based solely on the number of surveys I was able to collect.

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Demographic Information

	Removals (20)	Non-Removals (15)
Average Age	33	38
Female	8 (40%)	10 (67%)
Male	12 (60%)	5 (33%)
Employed	8 (40%)	3 (20%)
Unemployed	12 (60%)	3 (20%)
Single	11 (55%)	4 (27%)
Two-Parent Household	3 (15%)	8 (53%)
Single-Parent Household	6 (30%)	3 (20%)
Medical Problems	8 (40%)	5 (33%)
Chemical Problems	15 (75%)	6 (40%)
Legal Problems	14 (70%)	4 (27%)
Birth Location		
City	8 (40%)	5 (33%)
Reservation	9 (45%)	7 (47%)
Small Town	3 (15%)	3 (20%)
Suburb	0	1 (.07%)
Parents/Boarding School	11 (55%)	10 (67%)

Cultural Upbringing	4 (20%)	9 (60%)
Placement in Non-Indian Home	15	
Average Number of Removals	3	

To repeat the comment made by Drs. Mindell and Gurwitt in the 1974 Subcommittee hearings, "the past educational practice has had devastating effects on several generations of Indian children" (United States. Congress. Subcommittee 62).

The experiences of the past generation (e.g., boarding schools) have had an immediate effect on my generation, resulting in a loss of identity and connection to community. These losses are manifested more deeply by the effects of forced removal.

More than half the parents of those removed attended boarding school, and more than half of those removed were born off the reservation. To me this strongly suggests a breakdown in connection to family and culture.

Of those I surveyed, three-quarters were placed in non-Indian homes. Those that experienced any kind of cultural upbringing experienced this prior to their removal. I see the loss of identity and the connection to family, and the abuses suffered through removal have had a devastating affect, as shown by those respondents that have chemical abuse problems

(as well as one mental health patient citing this as the core of her issues). The survey also shows the inherent need for those who had been removed to find their identity. A large part of who they are was missing. There are those who still do not know who their family is.

As in my own experience, 60% of the respondents' reactions to removals were mixed because of the dysfunction of their families. What was not taken into consideration, however (in what was viewed as their "best interest" by the social system and court system by removing these children), was the long-term devastation caused by these decisions. As a result, we now have those having gone through this experience looking to the Indian community for identity and understanding. We too are a seventh generation that was thought of by our ancestors. I believe that if the Indian community, in general, truly believes that its children are its most valuable resource, then we must help those attempting to recover what they have lost through forced removal and help them to feel they belong.

This project will help the community become more aware that the effects of forced removal are often linked to other problems within the community, such as chemical abuse and alienation from a person's cultural identity. I hope the community will stop its denial of the problem, recognize it, embrace it, and by doing so, stop blaming the victim.

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Cheryl Avina
NAES College/721-1909
Student Field Project Survey

RELEASE FORM

The information on this survey will be used for Cheryl Avina's Bachelor of Arts Degree Field Project. The field project is the focal point of the student's course of study. The purpose of this survey is to identify the effects that forced removal from family and culture, as children, has had on adults. This project will serve as a valuable resource to the community, providing a tool for advocacy, training and policy making.

Participants are not asked to sign this form. By filling this survey out respondents agree to take part in this survey. The identity of the participants answering this survey is and will remain anonymous. Respondents are able to withdraw from answering or submitting the survey at any time. Should participants wish to find out the results of this survey, a copy will be provided.

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SURVEY

Age: _____

Do you consider yourself American Indian? Yes ____ No ____

Tribal Affiliation: _____

Female _____ Male _____

Education: High School _____ GED _____ College(yrs) _____

Last grade level completed _____

Employment Status: Employed _____ Unemployed _____

Are you: Single parent of household ____

Two parent of household ____

Single ____

Living with extended family ____

Have you had serious medical problems? Yes ____ No ____

Have you had chemical problems? Yes ____ No ____

Have you had legal problems? Yes ____ No ____

Were you born: City ____ Reservation ____ Small town ____

Did your parents attend boarding school? Yes ____ No ____

As a child did you experience the ways of your people? What were they?

Were you ever removed from your home? Yes _____ No _____

Number of times? _____

Where were you taken to live?

Foster Home _____: Your tribe _____ Different tribe _____
Non-Indian home _____

Adoptive Home _____: Your tribe _____ Different tribe _____
Non-Indian home _____

Extended Family _____
Juvenile Detention _____
Other _____ (explain)

How old were you when you were first removed from your home? _____
Do you remember how you felt when this happened? (explain)

Were you able to keep in contact with your parents, family? Yes ___ No ___

When you were removed from your home, what reasons do you remember being given? (explain)

Looking back, was/were your removal(s) from your home: Positive, Negative, Mixed? (circle one) Explain why?

What did the effects of your removal have on you?

Do you think that the foster home/adoptive home experience has affected your *Indianness*?

What made you decide that you needed to learn about your own cultural identity?

Do you think there is support and help in the community for a person who is trying to find their Indian identity? Yes _____ No _____

(cont. on back)

In what way do you see that the following have assisted you? (explain)

A. Agency

B. Personal

C. Community

D. Family

E. Other

Please feel free to provide information you think is important to share. (your time and sharing is greatly appreciated).